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ABSTRACT

Application of certain anthropological research methods to teacher education, particularly the field experience component, could have a beneficial effect on a future teacher's perception of his role. Present field experience programs can be divided into two types: "apprentice" or student teaching, in which the teacher trainee progresses from observing to a teaching role in one class with one supervisor; "Professional" or internship, in which the teacher trainee is seen as a bona fide teacher by the students , but still remains somewhat under the supervision of the training institution. A third type, the anthropological "participant-observer model," is proposed as a substitute for the first two. As a participant-observer, the teacher trainee would work independently as a bona fide teacher within one classroom and would also observe other teachers in different schools and have discussions with them. The anthropological tradition of an intensive study of one small group could also have its equivalent in teacher education. One or two years of required elementary school teaching would help a teacher to perceive the organizational, social, and cultural factors which interact within a school setting. (RT)

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Implications of Ethnographic Approaches for Teacher Training Programs

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Implications of Ethnographic Approaches for Teacher Training Programs[1]

Introduction

The widespread interest in developing a functional, more workable fit between teacher training programs and the puzzling complexities and demands of the teaching experience is producing a diversity of program models. There are reports of instructional and teacher resource laboratories, internship-residency, community involvement, and work-study programs, clinic teams, and crisis centers, in various stages of proposal and implementation.[2] Within this diversity there is manifest a common interest in some form of reality test--some structural or processual mechanism through which, it is intended, trainees will undergo a significant preparatory experience. The mechanism generally reconstitutes the trainee's field experience or injects into that experience a meaningful support service.

The models often draw in familiar ways--structurally, or at least metaphorically--on aspects of medical training and practice. Perhaps the eclectic nature of education makes it predictable that in the construction of models, we will find useful an operating reference point in some other discipline or tradition. (There may be some kind of natural but obscure limit on how innovative we can be if we confine ourselves to educational structures and institutions.) The general reference point of this paper's discussion is anthropology, in particular, implications of its traditional methodology and research interest. The discussion of one such implication draws upon the participant-observer role in ethnographic research to consider the organizational and experiential context in which the trainee's

initial classroom teaching takes place. The discussion of a second implication draws on the anthropological tradition of "small community" research to consider more general changes in training programs. It is not advocated that the implications in and of themselves are logically related only to ethnographic approaches, but that the latter constitute a heuristic framework for their consideration.

Implications of the Participant Observer Role

"Participant observation," Kluckhohn states, "is conscious and systematic sharing, insofar as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons." "The purpose," she goes on, "is to obtain data about behavior through direct contact and in terms of specific situations so that distortion is at a minimum,"[3] goals as appropriate to teacher trainees as to ethnographers. The participant-observer role is traditionally one in which the investigator begins as an observer and gradually develops the role of participant--that is, becomes more functionally involved in the culture under study. In this discussion I am proposing that a trainee acquire experience with this role simultaneously with his initial teaching experience; that therefore at least two distinct school sites and populations be utilized in a teacher education program, one for training, a second for field work. The rationale for this division is located, it will be argued, in the serious and seemingly unavoidable institutional constraints which schools and schools of education impose on the training experience.

Models of Teacher Training:

For purposes of this discussion I will telescope training programs into two general categories, an "apprentice" model and a "professional" model, and present a brief and somewhat oversimplified characterization of each.

(a) The Apprentice Model

The apprentice model typifies traditional teacher training programs and derives its character from the student-teacher role and experience. The structure and content of the role are familiar. The training institution maintains relatively tight control of the trainee, allocating a specific period of time to student teaching, supervising the selection of a training site, and monitoring (sometimes systematically, more often haphazardly and infrequently) the student-teacher's behavior in the classroom. The host teacher serves as a surrogate for the training institution and provides most of the evaluative data on the trainee. There prevails a master-apprentice relationship, and the immediate social context of the training experience reinforces this relationship. Students perceive and are made aware of the hierarchically subordinate role of the student teacher (their inventiveness in devising socializing tests is a familiar phenomenon). The trainee is there to learn, first by observing and then by gradually taking on para- and genuine teaching responsibilities. At some point the host teacher decides the trainee is ready to be examined, and she withdraws to observe, to evaluate, and eventually to indicate by her frequent absence from the classroom that the apprenticeship is in the completion stages.

(b) The Professional Model

The professional model derives its character from the more recently evolved intern role. Compared with the student-teacher role, it is professional to the extent that it makes and acts on the assumption that an extended, more autonomous training experience in a clearly defined role as teacher will be more effective and more appropriate. Generally, the training institution structures an intensive preparatory program of several months at the end of which the intern, it is assumed, is prepared to undertake a regular classroom assignment. He is employed by a school for a full year. It is intended that he be viewed by his students as a bona fide teacher; he no longer moves, under their scrutiny, from the role of apprentice to that of teacher. He is, however, reminded that his internship remains a training experience by virtue of a reduced teaching load, a number of required seminars at the training institution, and periodic observations and evaluations conducted by representatives of both the school and the training institution.

In neither program is the trainee realistically free to investigate the nature of teaching independent of the institutional context in which he is being trained.[4] Extended observations are with few exceptions limited to the classroom in which he will assume the role of a teacher. In the case of the student-teacher, he observes an individual who will eventually evaluate his own performance. Thus whatever the trainee may learn from his observations, whatever judgments he makes, whatever uncertainties he feels compelled to probe and dissect, are constrained by the ambivalence of a relationship characterized by both collegial and superordinate-subordinate

norms. The intern has fewer opportunities for independent observations of teaching. While he may be required, during the preparatory period, to observe teaching (including his own, if videotape is used), the training context imposes predictable constraints. Certainly the experience during the school year is an insulated one, tending to be limited to the intern's own interaction with the role of teacher.

One would not expect it to be otherwise. The survival impulses of organizations include a nervous concern for the efficacy of the socialization process through which new members are taught appropriate behavior and attitudes. This is as true for a college of education as it is for a school. Although the two institutions may not necessarily be committed to or manifest the precise same set of norms regarding teaching and teacher behavior, they share a common drive to co-opt the trainee. Parenthetically, they also share the difficulty, if not impossibility, of imposing on the trainee's experience a systematic, objective and valid performance evaluation. Most of the elements of the evaluative process we are able to exploit--authority rights, a rationale, criteria--except the most essential one, a functional measure. Hence the constraints we impose on trainees have an elusive, shifting base, and ultimately, in spite of our well-intentioned ministrations, the trainee must look to himself (and his students) to validate his performance.

(c) <u>The Participant-Observer Model</u>

The application of the participant-observer role discussed here might also be (methodologically and semantically) more accurately conceived as a trainee-field worker model. Specifically the field experience this

model points to consists of: (1) participation as a teacher in the life of a classroom, and (2) the observation of a teacher(s) in a different school setting; that is, observation and logically related methodological approaches--especially interviews--such that the trainee perceives, begins to understand, and therefore also "participates" in the world of the teacher he observes.

The important considerations are to what extent and in what ways the trainee moves beyond simple observation, and in the process structures meaningful social interaction with his informant. If in the technical sense he remains an observer, only the most perfunctory kind of social interaction with the informant takes place--that which is required to effect entree into the observational setting. The data collected remain insulated from the perceptions of his informant--a provision consistent with cannons of acceptable research procedure when the goal is to observe, record and categorize teacher behavior--but not by itself particularly useful to the training experience. Indeed, to emphasize this point, I suggest that we may already be surfeited with non-contextual observational data on teacher-classroom behavior. We are knowledgeable about how teachers behave in the classroom. Furthermore, there tends to be implicit or explicit in our conceptualization of this behavior--and often in our observational schedules--a generalized value judgment about how teachers ought to behave, a judgment that tends to manifest some kind of behavioral dichotomy, i.e., authoritarian-democratic, didactic-heuristic, direct-indirect, convergent-divergent. But we have a paucity of data on <u>why</u> teachers behave as they do. Academia, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Thus our relative inability to

provide definitive causal explanations for patterns of teacher-classroom behavior does not discourage us from devising our own explanations, which in a general way point to the personality of the teacher rather than to alternative explanations, such as organizational characteristics and processes, curriculum structure and content, or even community social norms and values.

If a trainee is to avoid simplistic explanations, he must, as field worker, not only observe but also enter into--participate in--the teaching world of his informant. In essence, he moves as far as possible beyond formal observations in the direction of an ethnographic approach, involving observations, interviews and interactions in both formal and informal settings.[5] It is in the latter, as countless field workers have reported, that one obtains the more personal, sensitive, or even conflicting information on the world of the informant. It is this world that trainees need to penetrate and the discrepancies between it and the world the trainees observe, resolve. The observer's description of the informant's world is inevitably oversimplified, due not only to the limitations of naturalistic observations, but also to the constraints which the observer's point of view imposes on the observations. It is of obvious importance that the informant's construction and perception of his world be obtained. Throughout the study there is a precarious but important role balance to affect between that of trainee and field worker. The role of field worker provides a detached perspective from which to view and gather data. The trainee role is, however, for the informant less intimidating and provides a different social interaction dynamic between the two. It allows the informant to view his own behavior as a vehicle for instruction as well as data collection.

The participant-observer or trainee-field worker model provides the trainee an opportunity to acquire a more realistic understanding of the complexities of the teaching experience. In our culture this experience is characterized by a value system or ideology which often bears little relationship to the persistent patterns of behavior functional to school routine. Although the disparity between reality and ideality is not peculiar to the teaching experience or to educational institutions in general, it is comparatively more acute and complex because of the central culture-affirming role schools and teachers perform. This disparity creates ambiguous occupational demands for both trainees and teachers, and in training institutions we are not particularly skillful in helping trainees anticipate such ambiguities. In a real sense the trainee must evolve in relative isolation his own adaptive responses to all levels of his occupational experience: ideological, organizational, and interpersonal. It is the intent of the participant-observer model to facilitate that resolution.

Implications of "Small Community" Research

I turn now to a second implication. The character of anthropology and its research tradition has been aptly summarized in a recent issue of Review of Educational Research.

> Anthropologists are committed to ethnographic field work entailing direct observation and participation in the flow of life surrounding them. Lengthy immersion in an alien culture (for at least a year initially, followed by return visits when possible), knowledge of the indigenous language and collection of a wide-range of data utilizing diverse methods are generally considered to be requisites for gaining a sensitive and accurate understanding of a socio-cultural situation and its dynamics.
>
> When gathering and analyzing data, anthropologists pay constant attention to the interdependence of phenomena; they tend to think in terms of cultural patterns or configurations. They attempt to

> see how each discrete fact relates to the total matrix of other parts collected on the socio-cultural situation. Furthermore, there is a strong concern for the undeclared meanings and latent functions of behavior (the "covert culture"), as well as for the immediately observable content and manifest functions.[6]

One might make the timid observation that it just isn't possible for an individual to respond successfully to all the demands of this tradition, and that it is presumptuous to think he can. As Gutkind says, "In short, they [anthropologists] believe that they can combine the methodology of science, the introspection of the artist, and the concerns of the humanist."[7] Whatever the claims, one can hardly dispute that the ethnographic emphasis on holistic or configurational studies is essential to understanding the complexity and cultural context of human behavior, and that competent ethnographic field work requires rigorous training.

For doctoral students in anthropology such training centers on the extended field study, generally in a cultural setting different from one's own. The tradition is strong. Without the field study, there is no anthropologist. With it, there is certification that the training program has been completed and that the trainee is possessed of both the skill and the experience requisite to begin a professional career. Perhaps we should impose a similar standard on teachers and make a field study requisite to the completion of a training program. Let me emphasize and enlarge on this position by briefly discussing a teacher training program that envisions at least two years of graduate study and that includes for all trainees a beginning experience at the elementary level.[8]

The point of view implicit in this proposal is based on two assumptions: (1) Extant teacher training programs do not (and perhaps cannot in their present form) adequately make allowance for certain social and organizational

forces, structures and processes which operate to impose on the teaching experience (and a beginning teacher's definition of her evolving occupational role) a narrow perspective on what teaching is all about, (2) The elementary school, particularly the primary grades, provides a site and population unique in the opportunities to explore the full range of the teaching role--with respect to both the actual classroom implementation of the role and the value system which the ideology of public education assigns to the role.

A discussion of social and organizational conditions which impose constraints on a genuine exploration of the teaching role could lead in a number of directions depending on one's theoretical and research framework. In order to call attention to the unique training opportunity which the primary grades offer, it is my interest here simply to identify for illustrative purposes several conditions which appear to have a progressively cumulative effect as one moves from the primary grades in elementary school to the upper grades in high school. I have reference to such conditions as (1) status considerations as a function of grade level and subject matter specialization, (2) limits on teacher-student interaction and the knowledge and understanding a teacher acquires about students as a function of the teacher-pupil ratio,[9] and (3) student ambivalence about the nature and value of schooling as a function of the number of years in school. The teaching role in primary grades is certainly not without constraints, e.g., there may be some specialization, if only on a limited, informal basis, and there are administrative requirements with respect to the number of hours assigned to specific subjects. Nevertheless, by comparison with higher

grades, the role is relatively unstructured. A trainee in a first-grade classroom is in a sense free as a trainee to engage in another, more personal kind of ethnographic research on the teaching experience--to explore and experiment with structures and patterns, to examine value orientations and social norms, to participate in and observe the classroom as a "small community."

I suggested earlier that the teaching experience in our culture is characterized by a value system which does not account realistically for the organizational demands of school life (as schools are now constituted). In making reference to a value system of the teaching experience, I have in mind a kind of generalized portrait of the ideal teacher in our culture, the characteristics to which we all seem sensitive. We invoke them when we talk about good teaching, when we react to teacher behavior we observe in classrooms, when we write teacher evaluation criteria, when we talk with teachers about our evaluations, and when we speculate about the kind of teachers we want for our children.[10]

The following questions developed jointly by several educational associations as a part of a discussion on fostering individuality in schools, represents a "statement" of the value system to which I refer:

1. Is the teacher selected deliberately for a rich, varied, and creative pattern of experiences?

2. Does he use clues which he finds in the cumulative records and in daily contact as a springboard for individualized assignments and projects? Does he, in fact, have an ever-increasing storehouse of knowledge about each child? Is he tolerant of extreme deviations in interests, values, intellectual specialities, creativeness, and competencies?

3. Does he involve his pupils in cooperative planning to bring into the open individual goals, concerns, and aspirations, as well as common needs and goals?

4. Does he record a description of each pupil's attainment and uniqueness, for his own future reference and to aid other teachers who will have the same child? And does he assess the accuracy of the description at intervals?

5. Does he provide outlets for the drive for recognition and success?

6. Does he find ways to limit over-selfish ambitions?

7. Does he help each pupil gain insight into his own limits and lacks as well as his unique strengths and resources, in such an atmosphere that the pupil can afford to seek a deepening self-perception and realistic self-appraisal?

8. Does he develop such relations that there is a general atmosphere of warmth in the classroom and each child feels himself to be accepted and supported?

9. Are pupil-teacher relations of such mutual confidence and openness that a child can bring his personal objectives, as well as his problems and difficulties--in learning or in personal matters--into the open without fear of loss of status, lowering of marks, recrimination, or humiliation?

10. Does the teacher genuinely encourage the free exchange of questions and new ideas? Is the situation conducive to boldly trying out new experiences?

11. Are creative productions and special aptitudes given recognition?

12. Are dissenters accepted as normal?[11]

The cumulative effect of these questions is instructive of how vulnerable a teacher really is. There are no clear boundaries on the expectations we hold. Teachers are somewhat in the position of the benighted politician who was asked, in response to a recitation of accomplishments, "Yes, but what have you done for us today?" Or to put it negatively, there is always something wrong with everything, especially teaching. There simply is no way a teacher can accomplish all that we ask of her, and we need to help her understand the intricacies of this dilemma. I am suggesting that both the field study and the primary grade teaching experience would to that end be useful.

A training program of this nature would not appreciably disrupt the flow of recruits for secondary schools or, for that matter, for other even more specialized and emerging educational roles. A two or even a three-year program would allow the exploration of a number of such roles and provide opportunity for a teaching experience at more than one grade level. Most important, we would all share a common teaching and research site and population, and would in our concern about schools begin at the beginning.

Footnotes

1. A revision of a paper presented at the American Educational Research Association meeting, Minneapolis, March 6, 1970 as part of a symposium entitled "Anthropological Approaches in Educational Research." The preparation of this paper was supported by the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, Contract No. OE-6-10-078, Project No. 5-0252-0305.

2. See, for example, such sources as: Remaking the World of the Career Teacher, National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, Washington, D. C., 1966; Theory Into Practice, College of Education, the Ohio State University, Columbus, Vol. 6, December 1967; Social Education, National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, D. C., Vol. 34, March 1970; Smith, B. Othanel, and others, Teachers for the Real World, Washington, D. C., American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1969; Engbretson, William E., "Analysis and Evaluation of Plans for Comprehensive Elementary Teacher Education Models," Final Report, Philadelphia, Temple University, 1969.

3. Kluckhohn, Florence, "The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities," American Journal of Sociology, 46:331-343, 1940 (p. 331).

4. Obviously a training status precludes by definition complete independence from the institutional context. The concern here is with the relative restrictiveness of constraints.

5. In Gold's terms he moves from "complete observer," through "observer-as-participant" to "participant-as-observer." Gold, Raymond L., "Roles in Sociological Field Observations," Social Forces, 36:217-223, March 1958.

6. Sindell, Peter S., "Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Education," Review of Educational Research, 39:593-605, December 1969 (p. 593).

7. Gutkind, Peter C. W., "The Social Researcher in the Context of African National Development: Reflections on an Encounter," in Frances Henry and Satish Saberwal (Eds.), Stress and Response in Field Work, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York: 1969 (p. 20).

8. For purposes of this discussion I shall be concerned only with the nature of the field experience in such a program to the exclusion of considerations of course work and other possible increments. The kind of field experience I am discussing requires, of course, supportive supervision with regard, for example, to the analysis of data.

9. Approximately one to 30 in the primary grades and one to 150 in junior and senior high.

10. One can piece together from a number of studies the kind of behavior and values different groups associate with good teaching. A personal source has been data collected during an extended ethnographic study of an elementary school. I have been struck by the confidence with which individuals, representative of a number of

school "populations" have asserted they can identify good teaching when they see it. I include school board members, administrators, parents, and educational researchers in these populations.

11. The Joint Project on the Individual and the School, A Climate for Individuality, Washington, D. C.: American Association of School Administrators, and others, 1965 (pp. 47-48).